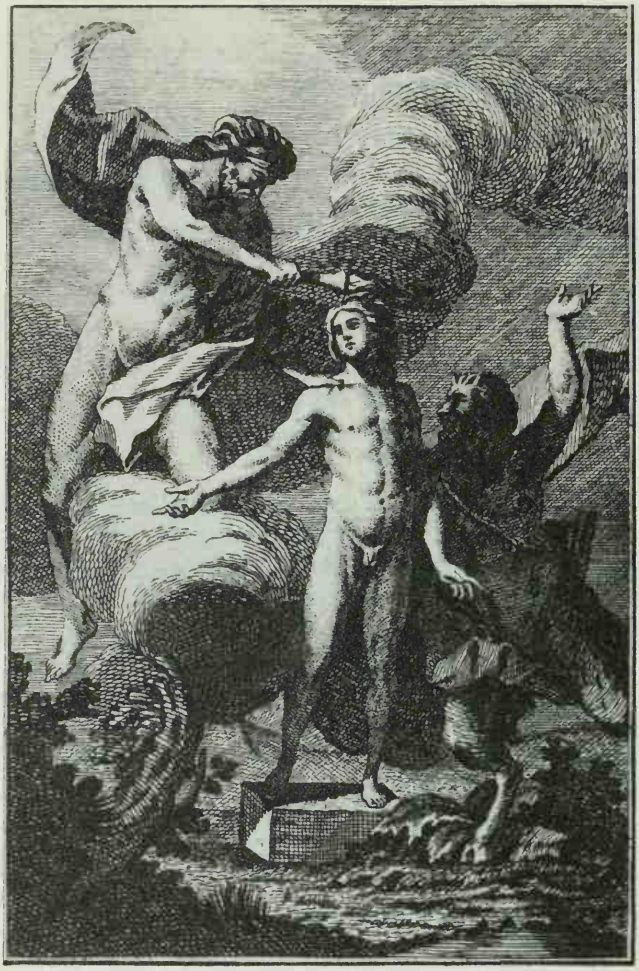

Satyr, you do not know it. See p. 14.

DISCOURSE

which won the prize
OF THE ACADEMY
OF DIJON
In the year 1750
On this Question proposed by the Academy:
Whether the restoration of the Sciences and Arts has contributed to the purification of morals

By a Citizen of Geneva

Here I am the barbarian because they do not understand me.—Ovid

GENEVA
Barillot & Son

PREFACE

[1] Here is one of the grand and finest questions ever raised. This Discourse is not concerned with those metaphysical subtleties that have spread to all departments of Literature, and of which the Programs of Academies are not always free: it is concerned, rather, with one of those truths that affect the happiness of mankind.

[2] I expect that I shall not easily be forgiven for the side I have dared to choose. Clashing head on with all that is today admired by men, I can only expect universal blame: and to have been honored by the approbation of a few Wise men ought not to lead me to expect that of the Public. Hence my decision is made. I do not care whether I please Wits or the Fashionable. There will always be men destined to be subjugated by the opinions of their century, of their Country, of their Society: Some men today act the part of the Freethinker and the Philosopher who, for the same reason, would have been but fanatics at the time of the League. One ought not to write for such Readers when one wants to live beyond one's century.

[3] One word more, and I have done. Little expecting the honor bestowed on me, I had, after sending off this Discourse, recast and expanded it to the point of making it, as it were, into another Work; I believed myself obliged to restore it today to the state in which it was awarded the prize. I have only thrown in some notes and let stand two additions easy to recognize and of which the Academy might perhaps not have approved. I thought that equity, respect, and gratitude required this notice of me.

DISCOURSE

We are deceived by the appearance of right.

[4] Has the restoration of the Sciences and Arts contributed to the purification of Morals, or to their corruption? That is what has to be examined. Which side ought I to take in this question? The side, Gentlemen, which becomes an honest man who knows nothing and esteems himself no less for it.

[5] I am sensible to the difficulty of conforming what I have to say to the Tribunal before which I appear. How shall I dare to blame the Sciences before one of the most learned Associations of Europe, praise ignorance in a celebrated Academy, and reconcile contempt for study with respect for the truly Learned? I have seen these contradictions, and they have not deterred me. It is not, so I have told myself, Science I abuse; it is Virtue I defend before virtuous men. Probity is even dearer to Good Men than erudition is to the Learned. What, then, have I to fear? The enlightenment of the Assembly listening to me? I acknowledge it; but only with regard to the composition of the discourse, not to the Speaker's sentiment. Equitable Sovereigns have never hesitated to pass judgment against themselves in debates of doubtful issue; and the most advantageous position in a just cause is to have to defend oneself against a Party of integrity and enlightenment judging in his own case.

[6] To this motive which emboldens me, is joined another which decides me: namely that, having by my natural light upheld the side of truth, there is one Prize which cannot fail me whatever my success: I shall find it in the depths of my heart.

[6]

PART I

[7] It is a grand and fine spectacle to see man go forth as it were out of nothing by his own efforts; to dispel by the lights of his reason the darkness in which nature had enveloped him; to raise himself above himself; to soar by the mind to the celestial realms; to traverse the vast expanse of the Universe with Giant strides, like to the Sun; and, what is grander and more difficult still, to return into himself, there to study man and to know his nature, his duties, and his end. All these wonders have occurred anew in the past few Generations.

[8] Europe had relapsed into the Barbarism of the first ages. A few centuries ago the Peoples of this Part of the World, which is today so enlightened, lived in a state worse than ignorance. I know not what scientific jargon more contemptible still than ignorance had usurped the name of knowledge, and stood as an almost insurmountable obstacle in the path of its return. A revolution was required to return men to common sense; it finally came from the quarter from which it was least to be expected. The stupid Muslim, the eternal scourge of Letters, caused them to be reborn among us. The fall of the Throne of Constantine carried the wreckage of ancient Greece into Italy. France, in turn, was enriched by these precious spoils. Soon the sciences followed Letters; the Art of writing was joined by the Art of thinking, a sequence which appears strange but is perhaps only too natural; and the major advantage of commerce with the muses began to be felt, namely of rendering men more sociable by inspiring in them the desire to please one another with works worthy of their mutual approval.

[9] The mind has its needs, as has the body. The latter make up the foundations of society, the former make for its being agreeable. While the Government and the Laws see to the *[7]* safety and the well-being of men assembled, the Sciences, Letters, and Arts, less despotic and perhaps more powerful, spread garlands of flowers over the iron chains with which they

are laden, throttle in them the sentiment of that original freedom for which they seemed born, make them love their slavery, and fashion them into what is called civilized Peoples. Need raised up Thrones; the Sciences and Arts have made them strong. Earthly Powers, love talents and protect those who cultivate them!* Civilized peoples, cultivate them: Happy slaves, you owe them the delicate and refined taste on which you pride yourselves; the sweet character and urbane morals which make for such engaging and easy relations among you; in a word, the appearances of all the virtues without having a one.

[10] This is the kind of politeness, the more endearing as it affects to show itself less, that formerly distinguished Athens and Rome in the so much vaunted days of their magnificence and splendor; by it, no doubt, our century and our Nation shall surpass all times and all Peoples. A philosophic tone devoid of pedantry, manners natural yet engaging, as far removed from Teutonic rusticity as from Italian Pantomime: Such are the fruits of taste acquired by good education and perfected in dealings with the World.

[11] How sweet it would be to live among us if the outward countenance were always the image of the heart's dispositions; if decency were virtue; if our maxims were our rules; if genuine Philosophy were inseparable from the title of Philosopher! But so many qualities *[8]* all too seldom go together, and virtue hardly goes forth with so much pomp. Rich finery may herald a man of wealth, and elegant attire a man of taste; the healthy and robust man is recognized by other signs: strength and vigor of body will be found under the rustic habit of a Plowman, and not under the gilding of a Courtier. Finery is no less alien to virtue, which is the strength and vigor of the soul. The good

* Princes always view with pleasure the dissemination among their subjects of a taste for the agreeable Arts and for superfluities which entail no export of monies. For besides thus nurturing in them that pettiness of soul so suited to servitude, they well know that all the needs which a People imposes on itself are so many chains which it assumes. Alexander, wishing to keep the Ichthyophagi dependent on him, compelled them to give up fishing and to eat the foods common to other Peoples; and the Savages of America who go about altogether naked and who live entirely off the products of their hunt, have proved impossible to tame. Indeed, what yoke could be imposed upon men who need nothing?

man is an Athlete who delights in fighting naked. He despises all those vile ornaments which would hinder his use of his strength, and most of which were invented only to conceal some deformity.

[12] Before Art had fashioned our manners and taught our passions to speak in ready-made terms, our morals were rustic but natural; and differences in conduct conveyed differences of character at first glance. Human nature was, at bottom, no better; but men found their security in how easily they saw through one another, and this advantage, to the value of which we are no longer sensible, spared them a good many vices.

[13] Today, when subtler inquiries and a more refined taste have reduced the Art of pleasing to principles, a vile and deceiving uniformity reigns in our morals, and all minds seem to have been cast in the same mold: constantly politeness demands, propriety commands; constantly one follows custom, never one's own genius. One no longer dares to appear what one is; and under this perpetual constraint, the men who make up the herd that is called society will, when placed in similar circumstances, all act in similar ways unless more powerful motives incline them differently. One will thus never really know with whom one is dealing: in order to know one's friend one will therefore have to wait for great occasions, that is, to wait until it is too late, since it is for these very occasions that it would have been essential to know him.

[14] What a train of vices must attend upon such uncertainty. No more sincere friendships; no more real esteem; no more well-founded trust. Suspicions, offenses, fears, coolness, reserve, hatred, betrayal, will constantly hide beneath this uniform and deceitful veil of politeness, beneath this so much vaunted urbanity which we *[9]* owe to the enlightenment of our century. One will no longer profane the name of the Lord of the Universe with oaths, but insult it with blasphemies that pass our scrupulous ears without offending them. One will not vaunt one's own desert, but disparage that of others. One will not crudely offend one's enemy, but malign him artfully. National hatreds will die out, but so will the love of Fatherland. Scorned ignorance will be replaced by a dangerous Pyrrhonism. Some excesses will be

proscribed, some vices held in dishonor, but others will be emblazoned with the name of virtues; one will either have to have them or to affect them. Let those who wish to do so, extol the sobriety of the Wise men of the age, but for myself, I see in it but a refinement of intemperance as unworthy of my praise as is their artful simplicity.*

[15] Such is the purity our morals have acquired, this is how we have become good Men. Let Letters, the Sciences, and the Arts each claim their share in such a salutary achievement. I shall add but one reflection: that if an Inhabitant of some distant region, seeking to form an idea of European morals from the state of the Sciences among us, the perfection of our Arts, the propriety of our Theater, the politeness of our manners, the affability of our discourse, our incessant professions of goodwill, and this bustling race of men of all ages and conditions who, from early Dawn until the setting of the Sun, seem at pains to oblige one another; this Stranger, I say, would guess our morals to be precisely the opposite of what they are.

[16] Where there is no effect, no cause need be sought; but here the effect is certain, the depravation real, and our souls have become corrupted in proportion as our Sciences and our Arts have advanced toward perfection. Shall it be said that this is a misfortune peculiar to our age? No, Gentlemen, the ills caused by our vain curiosity are as old *[10]* as the world. The daily rise and fall of the Ocean's waters have not been more strictly subjected to the course of the Star that illumines us by night, than has the fate of morals and probity to the progress of the Sciences and Arts. Virtue has been seen fleeing in proportion as their light rose on our horizon, and the same phenomenon has been observed at all times and in all places.

[17] Consider Egypt, that first school of the Universe, that fertile climate beneath a brazen sky, that famous land from which Sesostris long ago set out to conquer the World. She became the mother of Philosophy and the fine Arts, and soon

* *I like,* says Montaigne, *to argue and discuss, but only with but a few men and for my own sake. For I find it to be a most unbecoming profession for a man of honor to serve as a Spectacle to the Great and wantonly to display one's mind and one's prattling.* It is the profession of all our wits save one.

thereafter was conquered by Cambyses, then by the Greeks, by the Romans, the Arabs, and finally the Turks.

[18] Consider Greece, formerly peopled by Heroes who twice vanquished Asia, once before Troy, and once by their own hearths. Nascent Letters had not yet carried corruption into the hearts of its Inhabitants; but the progress of the Arts, the disintegration of morals, and the Macedonian's yoke closely followed one another; and Greece, ever learned, ever voluptuous, and ever enslaved, thereafter experienced, throughout its revolutions, nothing but a change of masters. All of Demosthenes's eloquence never succeeded in revivifying a body which luxury and the Arts had enervated.

[19] It is at the time of Ennius and of Terence that Rome, founded by a Shepherd and rendered illustrious by Tillers of the soil, begins to degenerate. But after the Ovids, the Catulluses, the Martials, and that host of obscene Writers whose very names offend modesty, Rome, formerly the Temple of Virtue, becomes the Theater of crime, the scandal of Nations, and the sport of barbarians. This Capital of the World finally succumbs to the yoke it had imposed on so many Peoples, and the day of its fall was the eve of the day on which one of its Citizens was given the title of Arbiter of good taste.

[20] What shall I say of the Capital of the Eastern Empire which, by its location, seemed destined to be that of the entire World, that refuge of the Sciences and the Arts banned from the rest of Europe perhaps due more to wisdom than to barbarism. All that is most shameful in debauchery and corruption; blackest in betrayals, assassinations and poisons; most atrocious in the combination of crimes of every kind; *[11]* that is what makes up the fabric of the History of Constantinople; that is the pure source from which the Enlightenment in which our century glories has come to us.

[21] But why seek in remote times proofs of a truth for which we have abiding testimony before our own eyes. There is in Asia an immense land where Letters are honored and lead to the foremost dignities of State. If the Sciences purified morals, if they taught men to shed their blood for the Fatherland, if they

animated courage, then the Peoples of China should be wise, free, and invincible. But if there is not a single vice that does not rule them; not a single crime that is unfamiliar to them; if neither the enlightenment of the Ministers, nor the presumed wisdom of the Laws, nor the large number of Inhabitants of that vast Empire have been able to protect it from the yoke of the ignorant and coarse Tartar, of what use have all its Scholars been? What benefits has China derived from all the honors bestowed upon them? To be peopled by slaves and evil-doers?

[22] Let us contrast these scenes with that of the morals of the small number of Peoples who, protected against this contamination of vain knowledge, have by their virtues wrought their own happiness and the model for all other Nations. Such were the first Persians, a singular Nation where virtue was learned as Science is learned among us; which so easily mastered Asia, and is the only Nation to enjoy the glory of having the history of its institutions mistaken for a Philosophical Romance. Such were the Scythians of whom such magnificent praise has come down to us: Such were the Germans, whose simplicity, innocence and virtues a pen weary of tracing the crimes and blackness of an educated, opulent, and voluptuous People, took relief in depicting. Such had been Rome itself in the times of its poverty and ignorance. Such, finally, has shown itself to be down to our own day the rustic nation so vaunted for its courage which adversity could not subdue, and its faithfulness which example could not corrupt.*[12]

[23] It was not owing to stupidity that they preferred other forms of exercise to those of the mind. They were not ignorant of the fact that in other lands idle men spent their lives arguing about the sovereign good, [and] vice and virtue, or that prideful ratiocinators heaped the greatest praise upon themselves while

* I dare not speak of those happy Nations which do not know even by name the vices we have so much difficulty in repressing, those savages of America whose simple and natural polity Montaigne unhesitatingly prefers not only to Plato's *Laws,* [13] but even to everything that Philosophy could ever imagine as most perfect for the government of Peoples. He cites numerous examples striking to those able to admire them: "But then," says he, "they wear no breeches!"

assimilating all other Peoples under the contemptuous name of barbarians; but they considered their morals and learned to disdain their teaching.*

[24] Can I forget that it was in the very lap of Greece that was seen to arise the City equally famed for its happy ignorance and for the wisdom of its Laws, that Republic of demi-Gods rather than of men, so much superior to humanity did their virtues appear? O Sparta! eternal shame to a vain teaching! While the vices, led by the fine Arts, together insinuated themselves into Athens, while a Tyrant was there so carefully assembling the works of the Prince of Poets, you expelled the Arts and Artists, the Sciences and Scientists from your walls.

[25] The event confirmed this difference. Athens became the home of sophistication and of taste, the country of Orators and Philosophers. The elegance of its Buildings matched that of the language. Marble and canvas enlivened by the hands of the most skillful Masters could be seen everywhere. From Athens issued those astounding works that will stand as models in every corrupt age. The Picture of Lacedaemon is less brilliant. *There,* the other Peoples used to say, *[13] men are born virtuous, and the very air of the Country seems to inspire virtue.* All that is left us of its Inhabitants is the memory of their heroic deeds. Are such monuments worth less to us than the quaint marbles left us by Athens?

[26] Some few wise men did, it is true, withstand the general tide, and guard against vice in the midst of the Muses. But listen to the indictment by the foremost and the most wretched of them, of the Learned and the Artists of his time.

[27] "I have," he says, "examined the Poets, and I consider them to be people whose talent impresses themselves and

* I should honestly like to be told what must have been the Athenians' own opinion about eloquence, when they so carefully excluded it from that upright Tribunal whose Judgments the Gods themselves did not appeal? What did the Romans think of medicine when they banished it from their Republic? And when a residue of humanity led the Spaniards to forbid their Lawyers entry into America, what must have been their idea of Jurisprudence? Do they not appear to have believed that with this one Edict they could make up for all the evils they had inflicted on those wretched Indians?

others, who claim to be wise men, who are taken to be such, and who are anything but that."

[28] "From the Poets," Socrates continues, "I went on to the Artists. No one was more ignorant of the Arts than I; no one was more convinced that the Artists possessed some very fine secrets. Yet I perceived that their condition is no better than the Poets', and that they both labor under the same prejudice. Because the most skilled among them excel in their particular Field, they look upon themselves as the wisest of men. In my eyes this presumption has completely tarnished their knowledge: So that, putting myself in the place of the Oracle, and asking myself what I would prefer, to be what I am or what they are, to know what they have learned or to know that I know nothing, I answered myself and the God: I want to remain what I am.

[29] "We do not know, neither the Sophists nor the Poets, nor the Orators, nor the Artists, nor I, what is the true, the good, and the beautiful: But there is this difference between us that, although these people know nothing, they all believe themselves to know something: Whereas I, while I know nothing, am at least not in any doubt about that. So that the whole superiority in wisdom which the Oracle attributes to me reduces to this, that I am fully convinced that I am ignorant of what I do not know."

[30] Here, then, is the Wisest of men in the Judgment of the Gods, and the most learned of Athenians according to the sense of all Greece, Socrates, speaking in Praise of ignorance! Does anyone believe that, if he were to be reborn among us, our *[14]* Learned and our Artists would make him change his mind? No, Gentlemen, this just man would continue to despise our vain Sciences; he would not help swell the mass of books that flood in on us from all sides, and the only precept which he would leave is the precept which he did leave to his disciples and to our Descendents, the example and the memory of his virtue. It is fine thus to teach men!

[31] Socrates had begun in Athens, the elder Cato continued in Rome to inveigh against those artful and subtle Greeks who seduced virtue and enervated the courage of his fellow-citizens.

But the Sciences, the Arts, and dialectics once again prevailed. Rome filled up with Philosophers and Orators; military discipline came to be neglected, agriculture despised; Sects joined, and the Fatherland forgotten. The sacred names of liberty, disinterestedness, obedience to the Laws, were replaced by the names of Epicurus, Zeno, Arcesilaus. *Ever since the Learned have begun to appear among us,* so their own Philosophers themselves said, *good Men have been in eclipse.* Until then the Romans had been content to practice virtue; all was lost when they began to study it.

[32] O Fabricius! What would your great soul have thought if, unhappily recalled to life, you had seen the pompous countenance of that Rome which your arm rescued and your good name adorned more than did all of her conquests? "Gods!" you would have said, "what has become of the thatch roofs and the rustic hearths where moderation and virtue used to dwell? What fatal splendor has replaced Roman simplicity? What is this alien speech? What are these effeminate morals? What is the meaning of these statues, these Paintings, these buildings? Fools, what have you done? You, the Masters of Nations, made yourselves the slaves of the frivolous men you vanquished? Do Rhetoricians govern you? Was it in order to enrich Architects, Painters, Sculptors, and Thespians that you spilled your blood in Greece and in Asia? Have the spoils of Carthage become the prey of a flute-player? Romans, hasten to overturn these Amphitheaters; smash these marbles; burn these paintings; drive out these slaves who *[15]* subjugate you and whose fatal arts corrupt you. Let other hands acquire fame for vain talents; the only talent worthy of Rome is that of conquering the world and making virtue reign in it. When Cineas took our Senate for an Assembly of Kings he was not dazzled by vain pomp or studied elegance. He did not, in that Senate, hear the frivolous eloquence that is the object of study and delight of futile men. What, then, did Cineas see that was so majestic? O Citizens! He saw a spectacle which neither your riches nor all your arts shall ever succeed in exhibiting; the finest spectacle ever to appear under heaven, the Assembly of two hundred virtuous men worthy of commanding in Rome, and of governing the earth."

[33] But let us cross the distance of place and time, and see what has occurred in our lands and before our own eyes; or rather, let us set aside repugnant depictions that would offend our delicacy, and spare ourselves the trouble of repeating the same thing with different names. My invoking Fabricius's shade was not haphazard; and what did I have this great man say that I could not have put into the mouth of Louis XII or of Henry IV? Among us, it is true, Socrates would not have drunk the hemlock; but he would have drunk from a cup more bitter still, the insulting jeers and the scorn that are a hundred times worse than death.

[34] That is how luxury, dissoluteness, and slavery have at all times been the punishment visited upon our prideful efforts to leave the happy ignorance in which eternal wisdom had placed us. The heavy veil it had drawn over all of its operations seemed sufficiently to warn us that it had not destined us for vain inquiries. But is there even one of its lessons from which we have known how to profit, or which we have neglected with impunity? Peoples, know, then, once and for all, that nature wanted to preserve you from science as a mother snatches a dangerous weapon from the hands of her child; that all the secrets she hides from you are so many evils from which she protects you, and that the difficulty you have in learning is not the least of her favors. Men are perverse; they would be worse still if they had had the misfortune of being born learned.

[35] How humiliating to humanity such reflections are! *[16]* How greatly mortified our pride must be by them! What! probity the daughter of ignorance? Science and virtue incompatible? What conclusions might not be drawn from such prejudices? But in order to resolve these apparent contradictions one need only examine closely the vanity and vacuousness of those proud titles which dazzle us and which we so gratuitously bestow on human knowledge. Let us, therefore, consider the Sciences and the Arts in themselves. Let us see what must result from their progress; and let us no longer hesitate to grant all the points where our reasoning shall be found to agree with the historical inferences.

[17]

PART II

[36] According to an ancient tradition passed on from Egypt to Greece, a God inimical to men's repose was the inventor of the sciences.* What, then, must the Egyptians themselves, among whom the sciences were born, have thought of them! It is that they saw near at hand the sources that had brought them forth. Indeed, whether one consults the annals of the world, or supplements uncertain chronicles with philosophical inquiries, one will not find an origin of human knowledge that corresponds to the idea one would like to hold regarding it. Astronomy was born of superstition; Eloquence of ambition, hatred, flattery, lying; Geometry of avarice; Physics of a vain curiosity; all of them, even Ethics, of human pride. The Sciences and the Arts thus owe their birth to our vices; we should be less in doubt regarding their advantages if they owed it to our virtues.

[37] Their flawed origin is all too clearly mirrored for us in their objects. What would we do with the Arts without luxury to sustain them? Without men's injustices, of what use would Jurisprudence be? What would become of History if there were neither Tyrants, nor Wars, nor Conspirators? In short, who would want to spend his life in barren thoughts if everyone consulted only man's duties and nature's needs, and had time only for the Fatherland, for the unfortunate, and for his *[18]* friends? Are we, then, destined to die tied to the edge of the well to which truth has withdrawn? This reflection alone should from the very outset deter anyone seriously trying to educate himself by studying Philosophy.

[38] How many dangers! How many wrong roads in the investigation of the Sciences! How many errors a thousand times

* It is easy to see the allegory of the Prometheus fable; and it does not appear that the Greeks who nailed him to Mount Caucasus thought any more favorably of him than did the Egyptians of their God Theuth. "The satyr," says an ancient fable, "wanted to kiss and embrace fire the first time he saw it; but Prometheus cried out to him: 'Satyr, you will weep the loss of the beard on your chin, for it burns when you touch it.' " That is the subject of the frontispiece.

more dangerous than the truth is useful, have to be overcome in order to reach it? The drawbacks are manifest: for falsehood admits of an infinite number of combinations; but truth has only one mode of being. Besides, who seeks it altogether sincerely? But even with the best will, by what indices is one sure to recognize it? Amid this host of different sentiments, what shall be our criterion for it?* And, most difficult of all, if we should have the good fortune of finally finding it, who of us will know how to use it well?

[39] While our sciences are vain with respect to the objects they pursue, they are even more dangerous in the effects they produce. Born in idleness, they nourish it in turn; and the irreparable loss of time is the first injury they necessarily inflict on society. In politics, as in ethics, not to do good is a great evil, and every useless citizen may be looked upon as a pernicious man. Answer me then, illustrious Philosophers, you to whom we owe it to know in what ratios bodies attract one another in a vacuum; the proportions between areas swept in equal times by the revolutions of the planets; which curves have conjugate points, which have inflection points, and which cusps; how man sees everything in God; how the soul and the body correspond to one another without communicating, like two clocks; what stars may be inhabited; what insects reproduce in some extraordinary fashion. *[19]* Answer me, I say, you from whom we have received so much sublime knowledge; if you had never taught us any of these things, would we have been any the less numerous for it, any the less well governed, the less formidable, the less flourishing, or the more perverse? Reconsider the importance of your achievements, then; and if the labors of our most enlightened learned men and our best Citizens provide us with so little that is useful, tell us what we are to think of that host of obscure Writers and idle Literati who devour the State's substance at a pure loss.

* The less one knows, the more one believes oneself to know. Did the Peripatetics doubt anything? Did not Descartes construct the Universe with cubes and vortices? Is there even nowadays in Europe a Physicist, however paltry, who would not make bold to explain the profound mystery of electricity, which will perhaps forever remain the despair of true Philosophers?

[40] Did I say idle? Would to God they indeed were! Morals would be the healthier and society more peaceful. But these vain and futile declaimers go off in all directions, armed with their deadly paradoxes, undermining the foundations of faith and annihilating virtue. They smile disdainfully at such old-fashioned words as Fatherland and Religion, and dedicate their talents and their Philosophy to destroying and degrading all that is sacred among men. Not that they at bottom hate either virtue or our dogmas; rather, they are the enemies of public opinion; and in order to bring them back to the feet of the altars, one would only have to banish them among Atheists. O rage for distinction, what will you not do?

[41] The abuse of time is a great evil. Other, even worse evils follow in the wake of the Letters and Arts. One of these is luxury, born, like they, of men's idleness and vanity. Luxury is seldom found without the sciences and the arts, and they are never found without it. I know that our Philosophy, ever fertile in singular maxims, contends, in the face of the experience of all centuries, that luxury makes for the splendor of States; but after forgetting the necessity of sumptuary laws, will it also dare deny that good morals are essential if Empires are to endure, and that luxury is diametrically opposed to good morals? Granting that luxury is a certain sign of riches; that, if you like, it even serves to increase them; what conclusion is to be drawn from this paradox so worthy of being born in our time; and what will become of virtue when one has to get rich at all cost? The ancient political Thinkers forever spoke of morals and of virtue; ours speak only of commerce and of money. One will tell you that in a given *[20]* land a man is worth the sum for which he would be sold in Algiers; another, pursuing this calculation, will find countries where a man is worth nothing, and others where he is worth less than nothing. They appraise men like herds of cattle. According to them a man is worth to the State only what he consumes in it. By that token one Sybarite would easily have been worth thirty Lacedaemonians. Try to guess, then, which of the two Republics, Sparta or Sybaris, was subdued by a handful of peasants, and which caused Asia to tremble.

[42] The Monarchy of Cyrus was conquered with thirty thou-

sand men by a Prince poorer than the least Persian Satrap; and the Scythians, the most miserable of all Peoples, resisted the most powerful Monarchs of the Universe. Two famed Republics contended for the Empire of the World; one was very rich and the other had nothing, and it was the latter which destroyed the first. The Roman Empire, having swallowed all the riches of the Universe, in its turn fell prey to men who did not so much as know what riches were. The Franks conquered the Gauls, and the Saxons conquered England with no other treasures than their bravery and their poverty. A band of poor Mountaineers whose entire greed was confined to a few sheepskins, having tamed Austrian pride, went on to crush the opulent and formidable House of Burgundy before which the Potentates of Europe trembled. Finally, all the power and wisdom of Charles the Fifth's heir, backed by all the treasures of the Indies, were beaten by a handful of herring fishers. Let our political thinkers deign to suspend their calculations in order to reflect on these examples, and learn once and for all that with money one has everything except morals and Citizens.

[43] What, then, precisely is at issue in this question of luxury? To know what matters most to Empires, to be brilliant and short-lived, or virtuous and long-lasting. I say brilliant, but by what luster? A taste for ostentation is scarcely ever combined in one soul with a taste for the honest. No, Minds debased by a host of futile cares cannot possibly ever rise to anything great; and even if they had the requisite strength, they would lack the courage. *[21]*

[44] Every Artist wants to be applauded. His contemporaries' praise is the most precious portion of his reward. What, then, will he do to obtain it, if he has the misfortune to be born among a People and at a time when the Learned, having become fashionable, have placed frivolous youths in the position of setting the tone; when men have sacrificed their taste to the Tyrants of their freedom;* when masterpieces of dramatic Poetry

* I am far from thinking that this ascendancy of women is in itself an evil. It is a gift bestowed upon them by nature for the happiness of Mankind: better directed, it might produce as much good as it nowadays does harm. We are not sufficiently sensible to the benefits that would accrue to society if the half of

are dropped [from repertories] and wonders of harmony rejected because one of the sexes dares to approve only of what suits the other's pusillanimity? What will he do, Gentlemen? He will lower his genius to the level of his century, and compose popular works that are admired during his lifetime rather than marvels that would be admired only long after his death. Tell us, famed Arouet, how many manly and strong beauties you have sacrificed to our false delicacy, and how many great things the spirit of gallantry, so prolific in small things, has cost you?

[45] That is how the dissolution of morals, the necessary consequence of luxury, in turn leads to the corruption of taste. If, by chance, someone among the men of extraordinary talents were steadfast of soul, and refused to yield to the genius of his century and to debase himself by puerile productions, woe betide him! He will die in poverty and oblivion. Would that I were making a prediction and not reporting an experience! Carle, Pierre; the time has come when the brush intended to enhance the majesty of our Temples with sublime and holy images will either fall from your hands or be prostituted to decorate the panels of a carriage with lascivious pictures. And you, the rival *[22]* of the likes of Praxiteles and of Phidias, you whose chisel the ancients would have employed to make them such Gods as would have excused their idolatry in our eyes, inimitable Pigal, either your hand will consent to burnish the belly of some grotesque figurine, or it will have to remain idle.

[46] One cannot reflect on morals, without taking delight in recalling the image of the simplicity of the first times. It is a fair shore, adorned by the hands of nature alone, toward which one forever turns one's eyes, and from which one feels oneself moving away with regret. When innocent and virtuous men liked to have the Gods for witnesses of their deeds, they lived together in the same huts; but soon, having become wicked,

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Mankind which governs the other were given a better education. Men will always be what it pleases women that they be: so that if you want them to become great and virtuous, teach women what greatness of soul and virtue is. The reflections to which this subject lends itself, and which Plato made in former times, amply deserve to be more fully detailed by a pen worthy of modeling itself on such a master and of defending so grand a cause.

they wearied of these inconvenient onlookers and banished them to magnificent Temples. At last they drove them out of the Temples in order to settle in them themselves, or at least the Temples of the Gods became indistinguishable from the homes of the citizens. That was the period of the utmost depravation; and the vices were never carried to a greater pitch than when they were, so to speak, seen borne up on columns of marble and carved on Corinthian capitals at the entrance to the Palaces of the Great.

[47] While the conveniences of life increase, the arts improve, and luxury spreads, true courage is enervated, the military virtues vanish, and this too is the work of the sciences and of all the arts that are practiced in the closeness of the study. When the Goths ravaged Greece, the Libraries were saved from fire only because of the opinion, spread by one of them, that the enemy should be left furnishings so well suited to distract them from military exercise and to keep them amused with idle and sedentary occupations. Charles the Eighth found himself master of Tuscany and of the Kingdom of Naples almost without having drawn sword; and his entire Court attributed this unexpected ease to the fact that the Italian Princes and Nobility amused themselves more trying to become ingenious and learned, than they exerted themselves trying to become vigorous and warlike. Indeed, says the sensible man who reports these two episodes, all examples teach us that in this martial polity as well as in all others like it, the study of the sciences is much more apt to soften and effeminate men's courage than to strengthen and animate it. *[23]*

[48] The Romans admitted that military virtue died out among them in proportion as they began to be knowledgeable about Paintings, Etchings, Goldsmiths' vessels, and to cultivate the fine arts; and as if that famous land had been destined forever to serve as an example to other peoples, the rise of the Medicis and the restoration of Letters destroyed once more and perhaps forever the martial reputation which, a few centuries ago, Italy seemed to have recovered.

[49] The ancient Republics of Greece, with the wisdom that was so conspicuous in most of their institutions, had forbidden

their Citizens the exercise of all those quiet and sedentary occupations which, by allowing the body to grow slack and corrupted, soon enervate the vigor of the soul. How, indeed, can men overwhelmed by the least need and repelled by the least pain, be expected to face up to hunger, thirst, fatigues, dangers, and death. With what courage will soldiers bear up under extreme labors to which they are in no way accustomed? With what spirit will they go on forced marches under Officers who have not even the strength to travel on horseback? Do not cite the renowned valor of all these scientifically trained modern warriors as an objection against me. I hear praised their bravery on a day of battle, but I am not told how they bear up under extreme labors, how they withstand the harshness of the seasons and the inclemency of the weather. A little sunshine or a little snow, the want of a few superfluities, is enough to melt and destroy the best of our armies in a few days. Intrepid warriors, suffer, for once, the truth which you so rarely hear; you are brave, I know; you would have triumphed with Hannibal at Cannae and at Trasimene; with you Caesar would have crossed the Rubicon and reduced his country to servitude; but it is not with you that the one would have crossed the Alps, and the other vanquished your ancestors.

[50] Success in battles does not always make for success in war, and there is for Generals an art higher than that of winning battles. A man may boldly run into the line of fire, and yet be a very bad officer; even a [common] soldier may need a little more strength and vigor than all that bravery *[24]* which does not protect him from death; and what difference does it make to the State whether its troops die by fever and cold, or by the enemy's sword?

[51] While the cultivation of the sciences is harmful to the martial qualities, it is even more so to the moral qualities. From our very first years a senseless education adorns our mind and corrupts our judgment. Everywhere I see huge establishments in which young people are brought up at great expense to learn everything except their duties. Your children will not know their own language, but they will speak others which are

nowhere in use; they will be able to compose Verses which they will hardly be able to understand; without being able to disentangle error from truth, they will possess the art of making them unrecognizable to others by specious arguments; but they will not know the meaning of the words magnanimity, equity, temperance, humanity, courage; the sweet name Fatherland will never strike their ear; and if they hear God spoken of at all, it will be less to be in awe than to be in fear of him.* I would as soon, said a Wise man, that my pupil had spent his time on the Tennis Court, at least his body would have been fitter for it. I know that children have to be kept busy, and that idleness is the danger most to be feared for them. What then should they learn? That is certainly a fine question! Let them learn what they ought to do when they are men,** and not what they ought to forget. *[25]*

[52] Our gardens are decorated with statues and our Galleries with pictures. What would you think these masterpieces of art, exhibited for public admiration, represent? The defenders of the Fatherland or those still greater men who enriched it with their virtues? No. They are images of all the aberrations of the heart and of the reason, carefully culled from ancient Mythology, and presented to our children's curiosity at an early age,

* Pens[ées] Philosoph[iques].

** Such was the education of the Spartans according to the greatest of their Kings. It is well worth considering, says Montaigne, that in that excellent and indeed truly monstrously perfect polity of Lycurgus, although it was so very attentive to the nurture of children, whom it regarded as its main responsibility, and although it was situated in the very seat of the Muses, so little mention should be made of doctrine: as if those magnanimous youths, disdainful of every other yoke, required only Teachers of valor, prudence, and justice, instead of our Teachers of science.

Let us now see what the same Author says about the ancient Persians. Plato, he says, tells that the eldest son in their Royal line was brought up as follows. After his birth he was handed over not to women, but to Eunuchs who, because of their virtue, enjoyed the greatest authority with the King. They took charge of making his body fair and healthy, and after seven years they taught him to ride and to hunt. When he reached his fourteenth year, they placed him in the hands of four persons: the wisest, the most just, the most temperate, and the most valiant in the Nation. The first taught him Religion, the second always to be true, the third to conquer his appetites, the fourth to fear nothing. All, I would add, to make him good, none to make him learned.

doubtless so that they may have models of bad deeds in front of their eyes even before they can read.

[53] Where do all these abuses arise, if not in the fatal inequality introduced among men by the distinction of talents and the disparagement of the virtues? That is the most obvious effect of all our studies, and the most dangerous of all their consequences. People no longer ask whether a man has probity, but whether he has talents; nor whether a Book is useful, but whether it is well-written. Rewards are lavished upon wits, and virtue remains without honors. There are a thousand prizes for fine discourses, none for fine deeds. And yet I should like to be told whether the glory attaching to the best of the discourses that will be crowned by this Academy is comparable to the merit of having established the prize? *[26]*

[54] The wise man does not run after fortune; but he is not insensitive to glory; and when he sees it so badly distributed, his virtue, which a little emulation would have animated and turned to the advantage of society, languishes and dies in misery and oblivion. This is what, in the long run, the preference for the agreeable over the useful talents must everywhere bring about, and what experience has only all too fully confirmed since the revival of the sciences and arts. We have Physicists, Geometricians, Chemists, Astronomers, Poets, Musicians, Painters; we no longer have citizens; or, if we still have some, dispersed in our abandoned rural areas, they waste away indigent and despised. Such is the condition to which those who give us bread and our children milk are reduced, and such are the sentiments they get from us.

Astyages, in Xenophon, asks Cyrus for an account of his last Lesson: It was this, said he, that in our school a big boy who had a small coat gave it to one of his companions who was smaller than himself, and took from him his coat, which was larger. Our Preceptor, having appointed me judge of this difference, I judged that matters should be left in this state, and that in this respect they each seemed better suited. Whereupon he remonstrated with me, saying that I had acted wrongly, for I had paused to consider what was fitting; and one ought in the first place to have heeded justice, which requires that no one be forced in what belongs to him. And he said that he was punished as we were punished in our villages for having forgotten the first aorist of τύπτω. My Schoolmaster would have to deliver me a fine harangue in *genere demonstrativo* to persuade me that his school is as good as that one.

[55] I nevertheless admit that the evil is not as great as it might have become. Eternal foresight, by placing medicinal herbs next to various noxious plants and the antidote into the very substance of the bites of a number of injurious animals, has taught Sovereigns, who are its ministers, to imitate its wisdom. By following its example, the great Monarch, whose glory will only acquire greater luster with every succeeding age, drew from the very bosom of the sciences and arts, the sources of a thousand aberrations, those famous societies that are charged with the dangerous trust of human knowledge at the same time as they are charged with the sacred trust of morals, by the care they take to preserve them in all their purity in their own midst, as well as to require them from the members they admit.

[56] These wise institutions, strengthened by his august successor and imitated by all the Kings of Europe, will at least act as checks on men of letters who, since they all aspire to the honor of being admitted to the Academies, will watch themselves and strive to make themselves worthy of it by useful works and irreproachable morals. Those among these Associations that will select for prize competitions honoring literary merit, topics apt to revive the love of virtue in Citizens' hearts, will show that such love reigns among them, and give Peoples the altogether rare and sweet pleasure of seeing learned societies dedicated to disseminating among Mankind not only *[27]* agreeable enlightenment, but also salutary teachings.

[57] Do not, therefore, urge as an objection against me what I regard as but one more proof. So many precautions all too clearly show the need for them, and no one looks for remedies to nonexistent evils. Why should the fact that they are inadequate stamp them as also common remedies? So many organizations established for the benefit of the learned, are all the more apt to make the objects of the sciences appear impressive and to direct men's minds to their cultivation. To judge by the precautions being taken, it would appear that there is a surplus of Ploughmen and fear of a shortage of Philosophers. I do not wish here to venture a comparison between agriculture and philosophy, it would not be tolerated. I will only ask, what is Philosophy? What do the writings of the best-known philosophers contain?

What are the Lessons of these lovers of wisdom? To listen to them, might they not be taken for a troop of charlatans, each hawking from his own stand on a public square: come to me, I am the only one who does not deceive? One claims that there are no bodies and that everything is in idea. Another that there is no substance other than matter, and no God other than the world. This one urges that there are neither virtues nor vices, and that moral good and evil are chimeras. That other, that men are wolves and may devour one another in good conscience. O great Philosophers! why do you not reserve these profitable Lessons for your friends and your children; you would soon reap the reward for them, and we would not have to fear finding one of your followers among our own friends and children.

[58] These, then, are the wonderful men on whom the esteem of their contemporaries was lavished during their lifetimes, and for whom immortality was reserved after their deaths! These are the wise maxims we have received from them and which we will transmit from age to age to our descendants. Has Paganism, given to all the aberrations of human reason, left to posterity anything comparable to the shameful memorials of reason made by Printing during the reign of the Gospel? The impious writings of such men as Leucippus and Diagoras perished with them. The art of immortalizing *[28]* the extravagances of the human mind had not yet been invented. But thanks to Typography* and to the use we make of it, the dangerous reveries of such men as Hobbes and Spinoza will last forever. Go, famed writings of

* Considering the frightful disorders Printing has already caused in Europe, and judging of the future by the progress this evil daily makes, it is easy to foresee that before long sovereigns will take as many pains to banish this terrible art from their States as they took to establish it in them. Sultan Achmed, yielding to the importunings of some supposed men of taste, had consented to establish a Printing Shop in Constantinople. But the press had hardly begun to run when it had to be destroyed and the equipment to be thrown into a well. It is said that the Calif Omar, when asked what should be done with the library of Alexandria, answered in these terms: "If the Books in this library contain things contrary to the Koran they are bad and ought to be burned. If they contain nothing but the doctrine of the Koran, burn them still: they are superfluous." Our Learned men have cited this reasoning as the height of absurdity. Yet suppose Gregory the Great in the place of Omar and the Gospel in the place of the Koran, the Library would still have been burned, and it might perhaps be the finest episode in that Illustrious Pontiff's life.

which our Forefathers' ignorance and rusticity would have been incapable; go to our descendants in company with those still more dangerous works that exude the corruption of our century's morals, and together transmit to future centuries a faithful history of the progress and the benefits of our sciences and our arts. If they read you, you will leave them in no doubt regarding the question we are examining today; and unless they are more devoid of sense than are we, they will raise their hands to Heaven and say with a bitter heart: "Almighty God, you who hold all Minds in your hands, deliver us from the Enlightenment and the fatal arts of our Forefathers, and restore us to ignorance, innocence, and poverty, the only goods that can make for our happiness and that are precious in your sight."

[59] But if the progress of the sciences and the arts has added nothing to our genuine felicity; if it has corrupted our morals, and if the corruption of morals has injured the purity of taste, what are we to think of that crowd of Popularizers who have removed the difficulties which protected the approaches to the Temple of *[29]* the Muses and which nature had placed there as a trial of the strength of those who might be tempted to know? What are we to think of those Anthologizers of works which have indiscreetly broken down the gate of the Sciences and introduced into their Sanctuary a populace unworthy of coming near it; whereas what would have been desirable is to have had all those who could not go far in a career in Letters deterred from the outset, and become involved in Arts useful to society? Someone who his whole life long will remain a bad versifier or an inferior Geometer, might perhaps have become a great clothier. Those whom nature intended as her disciples had no need of masters. Such men as Verulam, Descartes and Newton, these Preceptors of Mankind, had none themselves, and indeed what guides could have led them as far as their own vast genius carried them? Ordinary Masters could only have cramped their understanding by confining it within the narrow scope of their own: The first obstacles taught them to exert themselves and to practice covering the immense distance which they traveled. If a few men are to be allowed to devote themselves to the study of the Sciences and the Arts, it must be only those who feel the

strength to go forth alone in their footsteps, and to overtake them: It belongs to this small number to raise monuments to the glory of the human mind. But if nothing is to be beyond their genius, nothing must be beyond their hopes. That is the only encouragement they need. The soul insensibly proportions itself to the objects that occupy it, and it is great occasions that make great men. The Prince of Eloquence was Consul of Rome, and perhaps the greatest of Philosophers was Lord Chancellor of England. Is it likely that if the one had merely occupied a chair in some University and the other received a modest pension from an Academy, is it likely, I say, that their works would not have smacked of their condition? Let Kings, therefore, not disdain admitting into their councils the people most capable of counseling them well: let them reject the old prejudice invented by the pride of the Great, that the art of leading Peoples is more difficult than that of enlightening them; as if *[30]* it were easier to move men to act well of their own accord than to compel them to do so by force. Let learned men of the first rank find honorable asylum in their courts. Let them there receive the only reward worthy of them; by the credit they enjoy, to contribute to the happiness of the Peoples to whom they have taught wisdom. Only then will it be possible to see what virtue, science, and authority, animated by a noble emulation and working in concert for the felicity of Mankind, can do. But as long as power remains by itself on one side, [and] enlightenment and wisdom by themselves on the other, the learned will rarely think great things, Princes will more rarely still perform fine ones, and Peoples will continue to be base, corrupt, and wretched.

[60] As for ourselves, common men, to whom Heaven has not vouchsafed such great talents and whom it does not destine for so much glory, let us remain in our obscurity. Let us not run after a reputation which would escape us and which, in the present state of things, would never restore what it would have cost us, even if we had every title to obtain it. What good is it to seek our happiness in the opinion of another if we can find it within ourselves? Let us leave to others the care of instructing Peoples in their duties, and confine ourselves to fulfilling our

own duties well, we have no need of knowing more.

[61] O virtue! Sublime science of simple souls, are so many efforts and so much equipment really required to know you? Are not your principles engraved in all hearts, and is it not enough, in order to learn your Laws, to return into oneself and, in the silence of the passions, to listen to the voice of one's conscience? That is true Philosophy, let us know how to rest content with it; and without envying the glory of those famous men who render themselves immortal in the Republic of Letters, let us try to place between them and ourselves the glorious distinction formerly seen between two great Peoples: that the one knew how to speak well, and the other to act well.